

"Transcend the Ordinary"

Kislev-Adar 5784

December 2023-February 2024

THE SACRED DARKNESS

By RABBI MYCHAL COPELAND

*"G'd is the creator of light and darkness." - Yotser Or
(Creator of Light) prayer*



As Chanukah approaches, it's been hard to find joy when my heart is in such anguish over the terrible suffering in Israel, Gaza, and here at home. It's tempting to equate our fear, grief and anger with the fact that we are entering the darkest time of the year - the season with the shortest days and the longest nights. But I would like to offer another perspective about darkness.

It is no accident that our Chanukah season falls around the winter solstice, the darkest time of the year. Like so many other traditions, ancient and modern, we celebrate with light and fire in the midst of winter's darkness. Chanukah comes at the darkest part of the year and we, literally, bring light into the dark time.

This time also feels "dark" as in difficult, scary, sorrowful, and we don't know when our metaphorical light will return. But I have been exploring the language of darkness and I feel a need to resist equating darkness with negativity and fear. It's a big task, since associations of darkness and blackness with fear are embedded deep within our psyches. Black, lesbian Zen master Zenju Manuel writes in her book, *Opening to Darkness*: "darkness and blackness have been rendered negative, fearful ... The use of darkness ... stand[s] for almost anything unwanted or anything mysterious."

But can we dismantle the association of darkness and negativity? The children's book *God's Holy Darkness* reads, "...Creation began in the dark ... Creation is God's work done in holy darkness ... We are reminded of the size of God's creation through the boundless beautiful black of outer space ... In the dark soil and the deep sea, we are reminded of God's love." We find holiness in darkness - after all, our holidays begin at sundown. Light and darkness are inextricably bound together, and are not even the polar opposites they are presumed to be. Darkness can be fertile ground for transformation. Jacob's all-night struggle with G'd led to his - and our - transformation into Yisrael. In darkness we are challenged to go to places unknown or unfamiliar, but if we aren't truly present to the darkness and we don't grapple with it as Jacob did, we miss opportunities for new ways of being.

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Chanukah invites us into joy. But we cannot light enough candles in eight days, or in any amount of time, to banish our grief. Creating light does not excuse us from acknowledging our fears or allow us to turn away from the world outside our homes and our sanctuaries. And although the calendar tells us when the days will again become light, we cannot know when our hearts will again find relief. But rather than rushing this season to bring light because the darkness is frightening or makes us uncomfortable, this Chanukah, may we face darkness with bravery, even with wonder and openness and a sense of awe. And as we bless the light we create, let us pray for peace and safety for all of us - here, in Israel, in Gaza, and across the whole world.

SHA'AR ZAHAV PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

OD LO AVDA TIKVATENU - OUR HOPE HAS NOT YET BEEN LOST

By DEBORAH LEVY



As I write in late October, the horrific events of October 7 are still fresh and overwhelmingly painful. And war continues. Where are we in December? At Sha'ar Zahav, many have family and loved ones living in Israel -

some of whom were killed or taken hostage in this largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. We all feel the pain of having our people targeted and so brutally killed. Some of us have Palestinian friends, loved ones with loved ones in Gaza or the West Bank. And the world's empathy for our Jewish pain has, as it has so often, felt inadequate.

Our communal and individual pain is deep; we struggle to express and address it. We

grapple with the distinction between anti-semitism and valid criticism of Israel's policies. We struggle with the pain inflicted on us as Jews, and we struggle with the pain being inflicted in our name. We grapple with the distinction and relationship between Hamas and Palestinians, and between Israel, Israelis, and the Israeli government. How can we articulate the complexities of context and history to move towards peace?

Our views of a prudent path towards peace differ. We are unified in grief, and disparate in our responses. Still, as Jews, we all turn to Sha'ar Zahav as a place to come together, for comfort, community, and prayer.

At Sha'ar Zahav, we have talked and struggled together to find common ground

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Sha'ar Zahav is a member of the Union for Reform Judaism, the World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews, California Interfaith Power & Light, and the San Francisco Interfaith Council

Our Journey to Judaism program is supported by grants from the National Center to Encourage Judaism

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across differences in the past. What I know in October is that, wherever we are in December - whatever the situation in Israel and Palestine, however much we have learned and shared, however successfully we have thus far managed to communicate with each other - I know we will need to keep talking, keep learning, keep sharing.

I believe we need to do this in order to keep our hope for a peaceful and democratic Israel alive.

One place our conversation continues is in our monthly *L'havin* discussions – Last Monday of each month, 6-7:30pm. Check your weekly email for the Zoom link and join us!

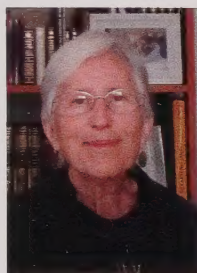
We say goodbye to Susie Idzik, with tremendous gratitude for her three years with Sha'ar Zahav. Susie's last day as SZ's Executive Director was November 15. We wish Susie wonderful adventures ahead and all the very best!

SHA'AR ZAHAV EDUCATION

NEXT STEPS AT BEIT SEFER PHYLLIS MINTZER

Editor's note: In this issue, we welcome Kay Magilavy as interim Educator, and we say goodbye with many thanks to Liz Jaroslow. Liz thanks everyone who has been involved in BSPM - and she'll remain involved as a volunteer for Family Holiday programs.

By KAY MAGILAVY



Sha'ar Zahav's Beit Sefer Phyllis Mintzer Shabbat School began this school year with a Sukkah gathering, a Shabbat dinner during the holidays, and Shabbat school on October 14. We welcome new families throughout the year.

Our school community explores Jewish practice and traditions through art, music, prayer, lively discussions and cross-age projects that provide safe paths to learn about Hebrew, Jewish values, personal growth, and responsibility for others. Grade K-7 teachers Ila Cherney, Martin Rawlings-Fein, Andréa Guerra, Michael Lederman and returning

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membership@shaarzahav.org

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Hinenileaders@shaarzahav.org

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The JGF is published with a generous donation from Jan Half.

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will be atoned for each Yom Kippur. The Jewish Gaily Forward is published four times a year: September, December, March, and June. To submit an article, please contact jgf@shaarzahav.org for info about deadlines, editorial requirements and length requirements.

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madrachimot (teen teaching assistants) create this nourishing environment. Rabbi Copeland and Cantor Bernstein are joining the teaching team with regular visits to the Morning Circle. This term includes a field trip to the Contemporary Jewish Museum, a telling of the history of Sha'ar Zahav and tour of the Castro by Ron Lezell, and a service learning day in the early Spring.

The school has been truly blessed in recent years to be directed by Liz Jaroslow and, before her, Sue Bojdak. As interim director, I look forward to continuing their commitment to build an empowering learning environment, and I am focusing toward a smooth transition for the new director when chosen.

We are guided by the Sh'ma: *And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them diligently to your children, speaking of them when you are sitting in your house, when you go on your way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.* (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) and by this mitzvah: *...serve your God in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything.* (Deuteronomy 28:47). Have children in your life? Contact me at education@shaarzahav.org, check out shaarzahav.org/religiouschool and schedule a visit to see learning in joy for yourself. May we move from strength to strength.

SHA'AR ZAHAV SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Let us introduce you ...

... Meet Vlad and Sasha, a gay couple who fled Russia under duress and were married in ICE detention ... Meet Enard and Gissela and their two school-age children who fled Honduras under duress ... Meet Carlos, a small farmer and water rights activist, who fled Honduras under duress ... Meet Ayo and Michael, who fled Nigeria and Ghana under duress and met each other on the journey in Mexico ... Meet Diana, Juan and Chelsy, and Camila and Mariajose, who fled Columbia under duress ... Meet Andru, a young gay man without a supportive family, who fled Venezuela under duress.

Some are LGBTQ+, some are straight; some speak English, most don't; they are people of all colors – black, brown, white. What do they have in common?

All have been accompanied by members of Sha'ar Zahav's Social Action Committee, as

part of the Nueva Esperanza Accompaniment Team (NEAT) program sponsored by Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity (IM4HI). Our Sha'ar Zahav team walks beside these asylum-seeking immigrants as they meet the challenges of a new culture and language, and recover from their traumatizing experiences. We assist them in finding and utilizing local resources for housing, food, clothing, schools, language classes, transportation, and legal services.

The Torah commands us in thirty-seven places to love the stranger. We get to know one another so they are no longer strangers. We show them that they are welcome into and part of the community and they are not alone.

For more information about an opportunity to get involved, please contact: Neil J Young (neiljyoung@yahoo.com) or Nancy Wecker (nwecker@earthlink.net).

Lia Rawlings-Fein

Lia Rawlings-Fein, child of Martin and Shelli Rawlings-Fein and sibling of Sadie, will be called to the Torah as a bat mitzvah on February 3. Lia is a lifelong member of our Sha'ar Zahav community and attends Beit Sefer.

Lia is a 7th Grader at Hoover Middle School on the West Side of San Francisco, where she enjoys studying math and playing trumpet in the school band. At home, Lia enjoys world-building on Minecraft with her best friend and others across grades, going to museums, and playing tourist with her family by riding cable cars and transit across San Francisco. She also plays with and has an avid collection of new and old-school Pokemon.



Lia would like to thank Karen Schiller, Ina Turpin Fried, Ora Prochovnick, Sarita Groisser, Rabbi Mychal Copeland, Cantor Sharon Bernstein, and all the Beit Sefer educators who have dedicated their time to developing and nurturing her Jewish identity.

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in honor of Steve Anderson and Michael Gitt upon the occasion of their wedding
in honor of James Raggio and Sarita Grossier upon the occasion of their wedding

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in honor of Sarita and James' wedding, and in honor of Allan Gold's and Tiela Chalmers' retirements

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in memory of Carol's brother, Frank Hyman

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in celebration of Josie's bat mitzvah
in celebration of James and Sarita's aufruf
and wedding

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in memory of his husband, Gerard Chevalaz

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in memory of his mother, Jan Tuzzolino

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in celebration of their wedding

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in celebration of Sarita and James' aufruf

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The congregation notes with sorrow the deaths of:

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Phyllis Schwartz

mother of Andy Schwartz

Marian Zailian

aunt of Jo Ellen Kaiser and great-aunt of Zoe Kaiser

Gloria Endres

dear friend of Alan Ferrara and Allan Gold

SEPTEMBER

Ilya Alexander Lehrman

grandson of Marvin Lehrman

OCTOBER

Shirley Don

"Bubbe Shirley" to Rena Frantz, Ora and Shayna Prochovnick

Alan Hafter

former husband of Jan Half

SHA'AR ZAHAV PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS!

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Mike Klayman (he/him)

Batsheva Natal (she/her)

SEPTEMBER

Wesley Ameliorette (they/them)

Deanne Edwards (she/her)

Eva Gillis-Buck (she/her), Ben, and Isaac

Ethan (Weisinger) Higgins (he/him) and

Clinton Higgins (he/him)

Julia Green (she/her)

Shana (she/her) and Amnon (he/him) Levy

"We feel at home in Sha'ar Zahav for its inclusive, authentic, intentional, artistic, present, loving Jewish Community."

Amy (she/her/they/them), Sarah (she/her), and Noah Rosenwohl-Mack

OCTOBER

Max Bogard (they/them)

Thomas Gurinskas (he/him & ze/hir)

Thomas began attending Sha'ar Zahav's online services after moving to an area of Ohio with no local Jewish community. "I've been a Zoom volunteer for the High Holy Days for the past two years and am happy to finally be a full member!"

Rebekah Mayne (she/her)

Rebekah is from Reno, Nevada, and is a student at USF.

Margret Tabunda (she/her) and Parker Pevitz (he/him)

Parker grew up Jewish and Margret is in the process of converting. They feel very welcomed and accepted at SZ. They are excited to be more involved in the SZ community.

Do you have something to celebrate? Email
jgf@shaarzahav.org

OCTOBER

Sarita Groisser and James Raggio

on their wedding

Josie Fox

on her bat mitzvah

Shaun Poblete

on their conversion

Alex Jacobs

on her conversion

Tiela Chalmers

on her retirement

Feygl Bonstin and Edgar Purviance

on their wedding

NOVEMBER

Ann Daniels and Jonathan Zingman

on the birth of their granddaughter Ayla

Adira Nguyen

Steve Anderson and Michael Gitt

on their wedding

Nathan Robinson and William Atkins

on their wedding

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1/6 page	2.25 x 4.5	13p6 x 27p	\$75.00	\$90.00	10% discount for four issues: must be prepaid
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Please note: Advertising deadline for our next issue is Feb. 20th!

Congregation

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Hanukkah

Celebrate the light with us!

Hanukkah begins the evening of December 7. We'll have lots of great events, including Hanukkah Shabbat with community candlelighting and songs on December 8 (in person and Zoom), Beit Sefer Phyllis Mintzer Hanukkah celebration, and other festive community celebrations! Stay tuned and watch your weekly email for details.

Sha'ar Zahav Hanukkah
party menorah lighting,
December 1999
Photo by Michael Bettinger

